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Plugging Leaks

CHRIS WALLACE: Increasingly frustrated over leaks of classified information, President Reagan wants a crackdown. And the administration has prepared a study recommending how to do it. But those recommendations have set off arguments among top White House officials who disagree over how to plug the leaks.

Robin Lloyd reports now from the White House.

ROBIN LLOYD: White House aides say President Reagan wants stronger action to be taken as soon as possible against all government officials who leak classified and sensitive information to the press; one official here saying there is a consensus now we've got to get tougher.

Top level administration officials say the decision to crack down on leaks came after the Libyan raid where one official said he was shocked at how much leaking of, quote, very sensitive stuff was going on.

This week the President's top advisers, including National Security Adviser Poindexter, Secretary of State Shultz, Secretary of Defense Weinberger and CIA Director Casey, will meet to discuss a secret internal memo which recommends greater use of polygraphs and the formation of a special FBI strike team to try to put a stop to leaks. Attorney General Ed Meese wasn't talking about the memo.

EDWIN MEESE: Well, you're talking about a topic that hasn't even been discussed yet. So I don't want to comment.

LLOYD: But already some administration officials have expressed opposition to the idea of an FBI strike team. Controversy also continues to surround the use of polygraph tests, with CIA Director Casey in favor, and Secretary of State Shultz still firmly opposed, along with many key congressmen.

SENATOR ORRIN HATCH: But the polygraph itself should not be a final conclusion. It should not be the basis upon which anybody is determined to be a leaker or a non-leaker or a criminal or a non-criminal. P

LLOYD: Already, two mid-level officials, one at the State Department and the other at the Pentagon, have been fired for allegedly leaking classified information. And officials here say there is widespread support within the administration for this type of disciplinary action, even as there appear to be continuing divisions about what else should be done.

Robin Lloyd, NBC News, at the White House.